

# **MUSKOX ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY FEDERAL AID PERFORMANCE REPORT**

**STATE:** Alaska

**GRANT AND SEGMENT NR.:** W-27-4

**PROJECT NR.:** 16.0

**WORK LOCATION:** Statewide

**PROJECT LOCATIONS:** Regions 3 and 5

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Status of Alaska Muskox and Factors Influencing Their Populations

**REPORT DESCRIPTION:** This statewide performance report includes the two regions involved in muskox survey and inventory activities. Regional activities are listed before specific activities by game management unit.

**PERIOD:** 1 July 2000–30 June 2001

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## **The Status of Alaska Muskoxen and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region III**

### **Regionwide Activities**

Activity 1: Write an annual survey and inventory performance report.

We wrote an annual performance report for both units

Activity 2: Prepare a draft muskoxen management report.

We wrote a draft management report for both units.

Activity 3: Provide information to the Board of Game during the regulatory process.

No information was provided to the Board of Game because muskoxen were not on the board schedule for this year.

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### **Activities by Unit**

#### **Units 26B and 26C**

Activity 1: Review and revise population objectives.

We reviewed objectives when the management report was drafted.

Activity 2: Monitor the results of the permit hunts in Unit 26B.

We monitored permit hunts. Reported harvest was 14 muskoxen in Unit 26B taken by 15 hunters.

Activity 3: Review information obtained by the USFWS on population size, and sex and age composition in Unit 26C, and on movements of radiocollared animals.

We reviewed USFWS surveys. They indicated that population size and calf production and recruitment are declining in Unit 26C.

Activity 4: Conduct composition counts in Unit 26B in June 2001.

We classified 287 muskoxen in June 2001. Sixteen percent were calves, 14% were yearlings and the bull:cow ratio was 75:100 cows > yearlings.

Activity 5: Replace radio-collars in Unit 26B to ensure adequate animals are available for survey purposes.

We replaced 2 radiocollars in June 2001.

**Segment Period Costs:**

<i>Expenditure</i>	<b>Personnel months</b>	<b>Personnel costs</b>	<b>Operating costs</b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
<i>Planned</i>	2.0	10.8	3.5	14.3
<i>Actual</i>	1.6	9.1	5.1	14.2
<i>Difference</i>	0.4	1.7	-1.6	0.1

*Explanation:*

Actual operating cost exceeded planned cost because muskox were more widely dispersed during survey and collaring operations than expected, resulting in higher than anticipated expenses for helicopter time.

**Submitted by:**

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Management Coordinator

## **The Status of Alaska Muskox and Factors Influencing their Populations in Region V**

### **Regionwide Activities**

#### **ACTIVITY 1: Prepare a draft muskox management report.**

Draft muskox management reports for Units 18, 22, 23 were prepared Mar–Aug 2001 and submitted to HQ in early September 2001

#### **ACTIVITY 2: Write an annual survey and inventory performance report.**

Performance report for Units 18, 22, and 23 were prepared August 2001 and submitted to HQ early September 2001

#### **ACTIVITY 3: Provide information to the Board of Game on muskox management.**

In November 2000, Unit 22 Area Biologist Kate Persons presented proposals to the Board of Game that were generated in July 2000 by the Seward Peninsula Muskox Cooperators Group. The proposals requested: 1) a new Tier II subsistence hunt in Unit 22B with a 5% harvest rate and a bag limit of 1 bull; 2) a new Tier II subsistence hunt in portions of Unit 22C with a 3% harvest rate and a bag limit of 1 bull; 3) a new Tier II subsistence hunt in Unit 22D SW, an expansion of the hunt area in the remainder of Unit 22D and change from a bull only bag limit to up to a 2% harvest rate for cows in Unit 22D and 4) change from a bull only bag limit to up to a 3% harvest rate for cows in Units 22E and 23SW. The Board passed the proposals, except in Units 22E and 23SW the Board approved a 2% rather than a 3% cow harvest.

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### **Activities by Unit**

#### **Unit 18**

##### **ACTIVITY 1: Conduct ground-based sex and age composition surveys on Nunivak Island and Nelson Island during late winter.**

No work was accomplished on this objective during this reporting period.

##### **ACTIVITY 2: Conduct aerial censuses of the Nunivak and Nelson Island populations during late winter to estimate the post-hunt, pre-calving population size.**

We conducted an aerial census of Nunivak Island on 12-13 July 2000 and counted 628 muskoxen. On 22 June 2000 we counted 233 muskoxen on Nelson Island during an aerial census.

##### **ACTIVITY 3: Monitor the location of radiocollared animals on the mainland of Unit 18 through harvest reporting, contacts with the public, and field observations to assess distribution and dispersal.**

No muskoxen are radiocollared at this time in Unit 18. We had reports from the public of up to 72 animals on the mainland during the time period.

**ACTIVITY 4: Monitor hunting and other mortality factors through harvest reporting, contacts with the public, and field observations.**

During this report period a hunt was not held on Nelson Island. The cow harvest on Nunivak Island was 44 animals and the bull harvest was 44. We received several reports of illegal harvests in the village of Nightmute.

**ACTIVITY 5: Improve communication with the public to reduce the magnitude of illegal and unreported musk-ox harvests.**

At a public meeting in Toksook Bay in January 2001 we discussed illegal harvests during the past few years and how to discourage it.

**ACTIVITY 6: Continue utilizing muskox management plans in cooperation with the public and other agencies.**

In January of 2001 we held a public meeting in Toksook Bay to talk about the muskox population on Nelson Island. During this meeting we discussed the Nelson Island Muskox Herd Cooperative Management Plan and the 2001 season. The group agreed to follow the plan and did not have a hunt in 2001 in hopes of having enough animals to have a hunt in 2002.

**Units 22 and 23SW(the portion of Unit 23 west of and including the Buckland River drainage)**

**ACTIVITY 1: Participate in the Muskox Cooperators Group meetings and facilitate exchange of information and ideas between agencies and user groups.**

The Muskox Cooperators Group met in July 2000 in Nome. Department staff from Nome, Kotzebue and Fairbanks participated in the meeting. The cooperators formulated proposals described above for consideration by the Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board.

**ACTIVITY 2: Manage muskoxen in Units 22B and 22C primarily for viewing, education, and other non-consumptive uses.**

When new hunts were authorized in Units 22B and 22C the hunt areas and seasons were selected to ensure that the most viewed herds near Nome and those along the road system are not subjected to hunting disturbance. Along the road system, seasons were delayed until roads are closed due to seasonal maintenance. Thus hunting occurs in the winter and does not conflict with road-based viewing, which occurs in the summer and fall when roads are open to highway vehicles. No hunting is allowed in the vicinity of the most accessible herds near Nome.

**Units 23NW, and 26A**

**ACTIVITY 1: Conduct a population census and composition-survey of the Cape Thompson muskox herds.**

A census conducted in June–July 2000 revealed 327 adults and 97 calves. This suggests the population was essentially stable during this segment period.

**ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the locations of radio-collared muskoxen at periodic intervals to assess population distribution and dispersal.**

No telemetry work was conducted in the northwest portion of Unit 23.

**ACTIVITY 3: Work with local reindeer herders to identify and minimize conflicts between reindeer and muskoxen.**

Activities related to reindeer herding occur in Units 22 and 23SW. Nome staff attended 2 Reindeer Association meetings and discussed presence of muskox on reindeer range.

**ACTIVITY 4: Improve communication with the public to reduce the magnitude of illegal and unreported harvests.**

Muskox management was discussed with Advisory Committees and local residents of Unit 23.

**ACTIVITY 5: Encourage cooperation and information exchange among agencies and muskox user groups to develop and implement management objectives.**

The USF&WS and NPS participated in the 2000 census. The USF&WS participated in the 2001 census. Local residents were hired to be observers on muskox censuses.

**ACTIVITY 6: Record reported sightings of muskoxen, particularly mixed-sex groups as an indicator of range expansion.**

Observations of muskox reported by the public and opportunistic observations by department staff were recorded in a computer data file.

**Other activities funded by Federal Aid on this project:**

In Unit 22, Tier II hunts were administered in Units 22D and 22E. Activities included assisting the public with the Tier II application process, permit distribution, hunter orientations and compiling harvest data. In Unit 22D 20 of 33 permits issued (61%) were filled and in Unit 22E 10 out of 15 permits (67%) were filled. Hunt administration was coordinated with federal staff administering federal subsistence hunts on federal public lands.

**Statewide Segment Period Project Costs:**

Fiscal year 2000–2001	Region			Statewide
	II	III	V	Total
Actual		14.2	90.3	104.5

**Submitted by:**

Statewide Total: \$104, 500

Peter Bente  
Wildlife Biologist III